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ABSTRACT

A major task involved in teaching students is to group wisely for instruction. This paper discusses the use of grouping in the following contexts: the self contained classroom; departmentalism and the student; homogeneous versus heterogeneous grouping controversy; learning centers; the dual progress plan; team teaching and grouping students for instruction; interage or multiage grouping; and the mainstreaming of students. The paper suggests that the plan or plans of grouping students needs to be based on a sound philosophy of education as well as a recommended foundation of the psychology of instruction. It contends that teachers and principals need to have an open mind in terms of how learners should be grouped so that each student can attain as much as possible in the school curriculum. The paper makes the following recommendations: (1) the plan of grouping must benefit the individual child in ongoing lessons and units of instruction; (2) an integrated curriculum whereby each subject matter area is related within the total curriculum should be implemented in grouping for instruction; (3) parents should be involved and informed about proposals for grouping learners; (4) inservice education for teachers may well be necessary when implementing a new plan in grouping students for instruction; and (5) the school curriculum and the approach to grouping learners for instruction need to be congruent and not separate in philosophical and psychological beliefs. (NKA)

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Grouping Pupils for Instruction.

by Marlow Ediger

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GROUPING PUPILS FOR INSTRUCTION

A major task involved in teaching pupils is to group wisely for instruction. Means of grouping pupils should reveal respect and acceptance of each learner. Learners need to be placed within a group in which optimal achievement is possible. Flexible grouping should be in the offing whereby pupils can get to know and appreciate learners from diverse backgrounds. Rigid, formal approaches which are outdated in grouping pupils for instruction should be avoided. Teachers and principal need to study and apprise diverse means of grouping pupils for learning. Ultimately, the best grouping procedures should be used in which pupils achieve as well as possible in knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

The Self Contained Classroom

Most elementary schools group learners in terms of being in a self contained classroom. Thus the teacher teaches a single set of pupils in a classroom for most of the school day, except perhaps for music, art, and physical education. The teacher has numerous opportunities to get to know pupils well in a self- contained classroom. Thus the teacher should be able to provide for diversities among learners so that each may achieve as much as possible. Teachers here should also be able to provide for different learning styles of pupils. I believe that teachers in the self- contained classroom can plan objectives, learning opportunities, and evaluation procedures well due to observing the same set of pupils frequently in the classroom setting. There are ample opportunities then to understand each pupil so that he/she might learn as much as possible. Pupils, too, can get to develop selected expectancies of teachers due to seeing them teach each sequential day of teaching. I feel that pupils develop feelings of security when they know what to expect of teachers. Should there be a conflict which hinders a pupil to benefit from a teacher's instruction, he/she could be

transferred to another classroom and teacher. Further advantages of the self- contained classroom include the following:

1. the teacher can relate subject matter from different curriculum areas effectively.

2. the teacher may use knowledge acquired from each pupil to more adequately provide for individual differences among learners.

3. the teacher might communicate with parents more effectively by knowing more about each parent and child due to the self- contained classroom.

Shepherd and Ragan (1982) list the following advantages and disadvantages of the self- contained classroom:

1. The self- contained classroom calls for placing a group of pupils with a teacher for the major potion of a school day. This enables the teacher to learn a great deal about individual pupils through long association and observation of them in a wide variety of learning activities.

2. The teacher in the self- contained classroom is in a good position to help pupils understand the interrelatedness of subject matter fields.

3. Pupils in a self- contained classroom have more opportunities for learning to participate effectively in group enterprises; they stay with the same group under the same teacher , for a major portion of the school day.

4. The self- contained classroom permits a more flexible use of time; significant learning experiences are not brought to an abrupt end because pupils must go to another class. It is easier to schedule field trips and other experiences that involve more than one period in the daily schedule.

5. Although subject matter knowledge is important for elementary teachers, other competencies , such as understanding child growth and development and ability to organize learning experiences, are also important. The scope and depth of subjects taught in elementary schools are not so great that they cannot be acquired by the regular classroom teachers.

6. The self-contained classroom can be modified to permit teachers who are weak in certain fields to exchange classes with other teachers.

Limitations Claimed for the Self-contained Classroom

1. The need for increased achievement in a basic subject calls for

greater depth of preparation on the part of the teacher than teachers in the self-contained classrooms generally have.

2. Critics of the self-contained classroom maintain that pupils need experiences with many teachers.

3. Teachers who are not well prepared in all areas may neglect the areas in which they lack competence; this leads to an imbalance in the school program.

4. Teachers in self-contained classrooms tend to become isolated form other teachers, rather than working as members of a team.

It almost appears that for every action, there is an opposite and equal reaction when analyzing the pros and cons of the self-contained classroom.

Departmentalization and the Pupil

One may departmentalize all curriculum areas on each grade in the elementary school. This would seem rather extreme, especially on the primary grade levels where the self- contained classroom holds strong sway. For selected educators, to departmentalize completely on the intermediate grade levels would be equally severe. However, intermediate grade children are older as compared to primary grade pupils and can adjust more so to complete or modified departmentalization. Generally, modified departmentalization is emphasized on the intermediate grade levels. Thus a teacher may teach science only in departmentalization. Or, mathematics might be taught by a single teacher to several classes of pupils. With departmentalization, the teacher may specialize in teaching one academic area only. Here, the teacher might truly develop proficiency in knowledge and skills of teaching one academic area only. I have observed numerous teachers teach two curriculum areas only, such a mathematics and science which is then a modified approach in a departmentalized elementary school. These teachers appear to feel more proficient in teaching when they can concentrate on teaching two curriculum areas only, as compared to the entire gamut of courses that a self contained classroom my emphasize.

There are disadvantages in a departmentalized plan of instruction in that a teacher may not be able to assist pupils to perceive relationship

of subject matter taught as compared to the self contained classroom. However, I have talked to departmentalized teachers who plan together with other teachers of additional academic areas in relating content. These teachers appear to feel that departmentalization in grouping of pupils does not necessarily make for a separate subjects curriculum. Thus a teacher can work with other teachers to emphasize relationship of subject matter taught. These teachers do feel that a little inconvenience is involved in planning with other teachers, but the consensus is that classroom teachers should always have opportunities to work together in planning the objectives, learning opportunities, and evaluation procedures.

In some ways, I believe that departmentalization harmonizes more with a separate subjects curriculum as compared to the self contained classroom approach in grouping pupils for instruction. If teachers and administrators do want more of integration of content in the curriculum, teachers in a departmentalized plan of instruction must work cooperatively with others to make this come about. Perhaps a modified plan can help such as one teacher teaching both mathematics and science and a second teacher teaching both language arts and the social studies to different classes of intermediate grade pupils. The modified plan would assist pupils to become oriented to a departmentalized procedure when entering the senior high school years. The sequence could be quite abrupt when a pupil has experienced a self contained classroom only and then the next school year experiences a strict departmentalized plan of grouping for instruction. A more gradual sequence would be recommendable.

Homogeneous versus Heterogeneous Grouping Controversy

There is continuous controversy over homogeneous versus heterogeneous grouping of pupils for instruction. Homogeneous grouping emphasizes a uniform group of achievers being taught in a single classroom. Here, the principal and teachers determine how best to arrange pupils in a given grade so that similar attainment levels of pupils are taught in one room. A wide range of achievement is not

wanted in homogeneous grouping. The belief emphasized in homogeneous grouping is that pupils of similar achievement can best learn from each other. Learners might then challenge each other more so if the attainment levels are more equivalent in a classroom.

With heterogeneous grouping, learners are of mixed achievement levels in a classroom. The fast, average, and slow are placed in the same room. There are numerous reasons for doing so according to its advocates. Democracy is more in evidence here as compared to homogeneous grouping. Learners need to work together with each other regardless of ability levels. I believe there should be both homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping. When grouping learners for reading instruction, I definitely believe that pupils should be grouped homogeneously. Why? For example, when teaching directed reading and pupils are reading orally to reveal word identification strengths and weaknesses, pupils should be somewhat uniform in reading attainment. If not, the fast learners will become restless in listening to slow learners read and slow learners might become embarrassed when fast readers listen to the many problems revealed in oral reading. The problems become even more pronounced in silent reading when the teacher in a mixed achievement level group has pupils read for a definite purpose. The fast readers finish quickly whereas the slow readers take much more time to complete the same reading activity. The teacher here may become ill at ease if the fast readers need to wait for what seems like a long time to have the slow learners complete the same reading selection. Pertaining to reading instruction, Ediger (1996) wrote:

> Many teachers group students homogeneously to minimize a wide range of reading achievement. Thus, a more uniform set of learners in demonstrating skills in reading is in evidence. It is easier to provide for individual levels in reading achievement if the range of achievement is somewhat uniform. Within a classroom, the teacher might then place the top, middle, and slower achievers into three reading groups. A single series of basal readers may be utilized in teaching and learning. Or, a multiple series might also be used on ongoing lessons and units. A major goal of reading instruction is to guide each student, whether in the fast, average, or slower group, to learn as much as possible.

There are numerous plans of instruction which may be used which

does not place pupils into high, average, and slower groups. As one example, Veatch (1959) wrote the following pertaining to individualized reading:

> One of the advantages of individualized reading over other methods is the elimination of pressure and tension from the student ... to meet the standards of the group.. Why should he be compared with anyone else? He is not like anyone else. When group competition is removed and the child is allowed to compete against himself, his own ability becomes the standard by which he is judged and tensions and pressures will give way to a more relaxed type of study. The removal of this pressure should eliminate the development of possible emotional blockages and undesirable attitudes toward reading.
>
> Maximum efficiency of the child's time is another advantage of individualized reading. The student does not drill with a group on words which only certain members of a group do not know. Instead, he spends time on his own list of words he does not know. The amount of time which the student spends in silent reading is also increased because he does not need to wait while others are reading orally. Instead, he spends his time in doing his own silent reading or in activities related to this reading.

Even though individualized approaches in teaching may focus upon a person, not persons, there still is adequate time in a school day for committee work in cooperative learning. Rational balance needs to exist between individual and group endeavors. Cooperative learning might well stress homogeneous or heterogeneous grouping of pupils for instruction. The same is true for individualized reading. It does not matter how pupils are grouped in individualized reading. I recommend here that pupils be grouped heterogeneously. Presently for pupils and at the work place later, each person works with others of diverse ability and achievement levels.

At various times during the school day, I recommend strictly heterogeneous grouping such as when pupils view an audio- visual activity in an ongoing unit of study. After the presentation, all pupils in a mixed achievement level classroom can benefit from discussing its contents. I believe that one should not become dogmatic on emphasizing one approach only, such as selected educators are doing today in favoring heterogeneous grouping only. These educators quote research

stating that pupils achieve at a higher rate in heterogeneous grouping as compared to homogeneous grouping. Generally , slow learners learn better in heterogeneous grouping settings. Why? There are motivated learners here who set the pace in learning and others then also need to achieve at as an optimal rate as possible.

Frequently, advocates of heterogeneous groping look only at slow learners and their higher achievement in heterogeneous grouping. They have one role for the fast learner only and that is to assist the slow learner. There are times when this should be a goal. However, the fast learner needs to have a challenging curriculum of his/her own with proper scope and sequence. As an elementary pupil, I was asked day after day to pronounce words to pupils in silent reading who raised their hands for assistance. At that time, I also wanted time to achieve personal goals in school. There certainly were times when I liked helping others who had difficulties in reading. I believe the dilemma can be resolved between heterogeneous versus homogeneous grouping with looking at what assists a child to achieve optimally. Which plan of grouping pupils for instruction then assists pupils to learn as much as possible on an individual basis?

The heterogeneous versus homogeneous controversy then might be summarized in terms of advantages for each plan of grouping pupils for instruction. Thus the former emphasizes

1. mixed achievement levels of pupils in one classroom.
2. pupils of diverse abilities learning from each other.
3. learners working more like the social environment emphasizes in that people of different attainment levels interact with each other.
4. usually, cooperative learning goes along with heterogeneous groping advocates in that pupils of diverse ability levels work together on a project.
5. the composition of heterogeneous groups should change, making for flexibility.

Homogeneous grouping advocates believe the following:

1. pupils who possess more of homogeneous characteristics can

do a better job of challenging each other.

2. the teacher can do a better job of providing for individual differences in a homogeneous grouping setting due to a smaller range of pupil achievement in a classroom.

3. each pupil can do more of his/her fair share of the work when committee endeavors are emphasized.

4. less looking down upon slow learners should be in evidence when pupils are quite similar in achievement within a classroom.

5. there can be numerous opportunities to stress heterogeneous grouping when pupils are in physical education, art, and music classes.

Again, there are approaches in teaching whereby it does not matter much if pupils are grouped homogeneously or heterogeneously. A language experience approach in learning can be used on any grade level no matter how pupils are grouped for instruction. Pertaining to the language experience approach in teaching reading, Bush and Huebner (1979) wrote the following:

> In the initial stages when children dictate their own stories, the teacher as recorder points out letters that stand for sounds, good words the children have used to express their ideas, and sentence structure. He or she helps the child notice similarities in beginning and ending sounds of some words and helps the children build a basic stock of of sight vocabulary useful in their reading and writing.
>
> Meaningful experiences with clay, paint, and other materials provide opportunities for further self expression. As children spontaneously talk about their activities, they are encouraged to write their stories.They write again in content areas as they record information on topics of interest, contributing to classroom newspapers or class books. The teacher encourages self expression and helps children as they ask for spelling, punctuation marks, and other aids to writing. Reading practice is obtained as the children read their own writing, each other's, and, finally, the adult writing in published material.

The language experience approach may be used on any grade and age levels. As long as one's own experiences are written down by others or by the self, the language experience approach is in evidence. Pupils may be grouped homogeneously or heterogeneously in the language experience approach in learning to read and write. The

content here may come from any academic area.

Learning Centers

An open ended approach to grouping pupils for instruction is to use learning centers. The teacher can develop each center and tasks therefore or teacher- pupil planning might be emphasized to develop the tasks for each center. The latter approach may take considerable time to implement but is well worth the time to do so. Being able to plan is so vital for each pupil to do and do well. There needs to be ample input from learners when teacher- pupil is used to develop the curriculum. The former approach in which the teacher develops all the tasks for the diverse centers can be quite open ended if there are more tasks available for learners to select sequentially than what can be completed. Thus learners individually may work on sequential tasks of their very own choosing and omit those not possessing perceived purpose. If tasks do not meet personal needs of individual pupils, the latter can talk to the teacher and negotiate more worthwhile activities from the pupils' point of view.

Humanism is inherent as a psychology when learners individually select their own preferred tasks to complete. Humanists are strong believers in guiding the pupil to make choices and decisions in the curriculum. Sequence here resides within the pupil and not within textbooks nor the teacher. The pupil is the focal point of instruction. Thus the pupil needs to be heavily involved in choosing the objectives of instruction, learning opportunities to attain the objectives, and evaluation procedures whereby the learner appraised the self. A humane curriculum should thus be an end result.

Pupils may select tasks that harmonize with their very own individual levels of attainment. They may choose activities that are worked on individually or activities may be chosen which emphasize committee endeavors. The choice is for the pupil to make. The problems of homogeneous versus heterogeneous grouping have been greatly minimized when using a learning centers philosophy in teaching learners. When pupils choose sequential tasks, they may work on an

activity individually. Thus it does not matter if the learners are somewhat uniform in achievement or mixed achievement levels are in evidence in the classroom. When a pupil chooses committee work as a task, then homogeneous or heterogeneous grouping may be in evidence. Perhaps, the teacher can guide pupils here to work with learners from both categories. The teacher encourages, stimulates, and motivates learners to achieve optimally in a learning centers approach in teaching pupils.

The Dual Progress Plan

The dual progress plan in grouping pupils for instruction is generally implemented on the intermediate grade level. The curriculum areas of mathematics and science are taught as being ungraded. there are no grade levels here. Pupils individually, however, achieve as much as possible. There are separate teachers for mathematics and for science, resulting in departmentalization. Those who wish to teach a separate academic discipline in the elementary school in mathematics and in science may do so. Teachers might also teach English and the social studies as an integrated classroom. There are homeroom responsibilities here for the teacher in teaching English and social studies. Guidance and counseling of pupils may be stressed during homeroom time.

Teachers who teach both social studies and English emphasize the graded concept here. Thus there are definite grade level standards for pupils to attain in social studies and English. The social studies - English teacher is in a modified self- contained classroom with two curriculum areas only, that need to be taught by one person. Team teaching could be emphasized here in the dual progress plan. It could also be stressed in homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping.

Team Teaching and Grouping Pupils for Instruction

The team approach in teaching learners emphasizes that two or more teachers plan together the objectives, learning activities to achieve these ends, and the evaluation procedures to ascertain how much pupils have learned. Notice the teachers must plan instructional strategy cooperatively, not individually. With cooperative planning, participants may think critically about ideas presented from team members. The best possible procedures presented should be used in teaching pupils. More than one mind is better than a single mind in preparing for teaching.

There are three levels of teaching using a team approach. Large group instruction is one level. After planning for teaching, one team member may teach pupils in large group instruction. How many pupils are there in large group instruction? If two elementary school classrooms are joined together, there might be fifty pupils from the two rooms. If three classrooms are joined together for large group instruction, there might be seventy- five learners from the three rooms. Could a team approach be used in large group instruction? The answer is in the affirmative. What is salient in large group instruction is that the teacher/ teachers do a good job of motivating pupils. Thus audio- visual aids that engage pupils in learning should be used in large group instruction. Teachers not involved in direct teaching in large group instruction may assist in monitoring learner progress.

The second level of team teaching is to assist pupils in small group endeavors. Within the small group, teachers guide pupils to clarify and discuss what was presented in large group instruction. Teachers here should use a variety of materials such as audio- visual and printed content such as in textbooks and tradebooks to assist each pupil to attain as optimally as possible. In small group endeavors, pupils will ask questions and identify problem areas. The teacher needs to guide pupils to locate relevant information.

A third level of team teaching is to emphasize individual study. Each pupil will have a topic too pursue or an area of interest to develop within the framework of individualized study. The leaner identifies a problem or wishes to pursue a task of personal interest. These kinds of

learning activities can be planned by the pupil and teacher. There must be a purpose in doing the project. Planning needs to accrue to achieve the purpose or goal. Next, the pupil needs to follow through with the work involved to attain the purpose. Ultimately, criteria should be developed to appraise the completed project. There needs to be heavy involvement by the pupil in working on the project method. Individual study goals must grow out of the large group session as well as from the small group work stressed. There is a definite relationship among large and small group instruction as well as of the individual endeavors emphasized.

There can be an interdisciplinary team as well as team members emphasizing a separate academic area domain. The former would be more typical of elementary school teachers in which the concept of the self contained classroom has been stressed in teacher education training at a college or university. Thus most elementary school teachers have not majored in a single academic area such as history or biology, but they have experienced a general education curriculum plus professional course work and student teaching in becoming a licensed teacher. If an elementary teacher was educated at a college/university school of education with a double major such as history and elementary education, then a team of teaches with similar training may teach social studies in a departmentalized classroom, An interdisciplinary team also could comprise of team members having majors in the social sciences/elementary education; English/elementary education; and biology/elementary education. These teachers would then plan the objectives, learning activities, and evaluation procedures for teaching a given set of learners in large and small groups as well as in individual work. Relationship of diverse academic disciplines might then be in evidence.

In team teaching, a leader of the team may be appointed and receive additional salary for being the designated leader. Team teaching has also be emphasized in which there is no designated leader, but leadership emerges within each planning session.

To implement team teaching, participants should have a voice in

which team they wish to participate in. No teacher should be forced to serve on a a team. Perhaps, with stimulating workshops on team teaching, teachers may feel motivated in desiring to be a member. Thus teachers must be knowledgeable, skillful, and possess appropriate attitudes prior to being members of a teaching team. I have known teachers who feared being a member of a teaching team and yet with inservice education felt motivated in becoming a team member. Ediger (1996) wrote:

... The term "team" implies that teachers work together cooperatively in determining objectives, learning opportunities, and evaluation procedures when teaching a a specific set of learners. Team teaching needs to be differentiated from "turn" teaching. In turn teaching, each teacher does his/her own planning for teaching and then takes a turn teaching pupils either in a large group or small group session. Other teachers also take their turns teaching these learners. However, there is little or no interaction among teachers when planning the objectives, learning activities, and evaluation procedures.

Democratic planning is very important when team members work together. Team teaching emphasizes that members learn form each other in planning sessions. Thus inservice education is an inherent part of team teaching as a plan in grouping pupils for instruction. If a leader or a member of a teaching team would be very domineering or autocratic, the chances are that individuals, of course, would not learn from each other. There needs to be mutual respect of personalities and ideas presented when team members select the best objectives, the best learning activities, and the best evaluation techniques to be utilized in teaching a given set of learners.

The talents of each teacher should be utilized when providing learning activities for pupils.. For example, when large group instruction is utilized in teaching ninety pupils, each team member's strengths should be analyzed to determine who should do the teaching in the large group session. If pupils are studying a unit on "New England - Past and Present," a team member may have traveled extensively in this area as well as studied its pat history thoroughly. This team member may have excellent slides, pictures, filmstrips, and booklets pertaining to the New England area. Thus, large group instruction, no doubt, would heavily involve using the talents of this member of the team. At other times, different members of the team will be utilizing their talents involving large group instruction in team teaching.

After the large group session has been completed, all teachers on the team should guide learners in small group sessions. Here, learners can ask questions pertaining to the content presented in in large group instruction.. Additional learning activities, carefully selected, can be

provided in small group sessions. The teacher needs to select activities which are meaningful, interesting, and purposeful to learners. Pupils need to be actively involved in ongoing learning activities. A variety of learning activities should be provided for learners in small group sessions. It should be pointed out that in large group instruction, the teaching team must consider and select those activities which capture pupil curiosity and are relevant for learners. If activities are not carefully selected, it will be difficult to hold the attention of pupils and valuable time in learning will be lost.

Ample opportunity also needs to be given to pupils to work on individual projects and activities. With the guidance of the teaching team, pupils should work on purposeful projects and activities on an individual basis which relate the large and small group sessions.

On the second level of instruction, team teaching places much stress upon pupils working in committees. Presently, many educators emphasize learners working in groups, known as cooperative learning. For group work to be successful, there is much that a teacher can do to assist in its success. In reviewing research pertaining to group work, Burk (1996) wrote:

... Acquaintance pairs in which one partner possessed a higher popularity status than the other tended to benefit least from the experience. The friendship/ popularity effect was even more pronounced with pairs of children who began the task with the same understanding of the balance. Acquaintances with a similar understanding of the task were more likely to learn if their partner's popularity status was different from their own. Why would popularity status have an influence on learning? Just as friendships evolve within the larger social world, children develop views of their classmates, whether or not they are friends with them. Popularity status is influenced by the number of friends a person has, but not by the intensity of those friendships. It may also be influenced by such things as stability, physical attractiveness and reputation... Popularity status may also affect the equal footing within the relationship that allows for greater cooperation. Because children may be friends with others whose popularity status is similar or different from their own, the two constructs must both be considered.

We as teachers need to facilitate the development of a psychologically safe environment that promotes positive social interaction. As children interact openly with their peers , they learn more about others as individuals, and they begin building a history of interactions. Some interactions will be very positive and develop into lasting friendships. Others will not, but an atmosphere of acceptance and respect in the classroom will help them to see each other as equal

members of their social world.

The influence of friendship and popularity on learning is still not well understood... If we focus our attention on cognitive development without consideration for the social realm, we may inhibit development of both realms. The common practice of not allowing friends to work together on projects is, therefore, open to question. Children need experience working with their friends as well as with acquaintances, who are potential friends. By recognizing and appreciating children's relationships, teachers show additional respect for children as members of the social world.

The above quote indicates the many factors that need consideration when grouping pupils for instructional purposes. Cooperative learning is salient since pupils presently need to work harmoniously well with others as well as at the work place later. It is an uncomfortable situation if an individual cannot work well with others and feels uncomfortable in doing so. The teacher then has important responsibilities in knowing how to group pupils to maximize learning for all.

Interage or Multiage Grouping

There are advocates of having pupils of different age levels being taught in a single classroom. For example, pupils in grades one and two could be taught in a single classroom. This could be a team teaching situation or it might emphasize a single teacher teaching a given set of pupils in interage grouping. The children taught here in one classroom could be quite heterogeneous. It could be also that learners in the two grades were grouped homogeneously by placing a somewhat uniform level of attainment of first and second graders combined in a single classroom. What is the focal point of placing pupils into interage groups? People interact with each other in society who are of different age levels. Second, it means little when speaking of a pupil being in grade one or two. Thus selected first grades read better than some second grade pupils. Third, learners need to get along well with others regardless of age levels. Social development is very important. Fourth, dividing pupils in classrooms by age levels is not too relevant. Pupils mature at different levels even though they are of the same age or

similar age levels. When serving as a rural school teacher for two years, I combined fifth and sixth as well as seventh and eight grade English, social studies, science, and mathematics. In many ways, this was done out of necessity to avoid teaching too many subject matter areas to each grade level. I have friends who taught all eight grade levels in the elementary school thus again necessitating the combining of grade levels for instructional purposes. Was this good to do? It was done out of necessity. My answer would be that it again confirms that grade levels may mean very little when thinking of learner achievement since I did have younger learners who attained at a higher level as compared to older pupils. Interage grouping of pupils for teaching has a different motive today as compared to when small rural one or two teacher schools were in evidence. Today, the emphasis is upon interage grouping to assist learners to work effectively with others so that social development may be more optimal.. Hopefully, academic achievement will also be at as high a level as possible for all pupils.

The Joplin plan for teaching reading emphasizes interage grouping. Here, pupils from grades four through six are regrouped en toto. Thus, fourth, fifth, and sixth grade pupils may be together in a separate room of twenty-five pupils to make for homogeneous grouping in reading instruction. These fourth, fifth, and sixth grade pupils then emerge in interage grouping whereby there are fast, average, and slow readers grouped homogeneously from the intermediate grade levels. Joplin plan advocates have made salient research claims from their research results on interage grouping in reading.

Mainstreaming of Pupils

Mainstreaming of pupils has made for an increased amount of heterogeneous grouping of pupils in the United States. Handicapped pupils are then to be educated in the least restricted environment and receive an appropriate education, according to the Education for all Handicapped Children Act of 1975. Before that time most children were continually taught within the framework of the handicap possessed, in separate classrooms from that of normal pupils. Thus an orthopedically

handicapped child was in a special room from that of learners in a regular classroom. Selected aggressive educators felt that pupils were being segregated based on the handicap possessed. Thus mainstreaming came into being whereby a handicapped learner was to be placed in the least restricted environment. This has usually meant the regular classroom.

Each child who is handicapped is to have a planned individual educational plan (IEP) to follow as far as the curriculum is concerned. An IEP consists of behaviorally stated objectives agreed upon by the involved parents, the teacher(s), the principal, as well as specialists in the field such as speech correctionists, physical therapists, hearing and sight resource personnel, as well as counseling services. No child is to be refused an appropriate education. If a child has not been placed appropriately, the parents can ask for a reevaluation. Parents may also sue the school if misplacement or diagnosis has been in error. If the judge or court rules in favor of the parents of the handicapped pupil, the school must incur all costs of the lawsuit. Judges tend to be generous in ruling in favor of the parents of the handicapped. With mainstreaming as a federal law, classrooms have become increasingly heterogeneous in grouping. Questions that can be raised of mainstreaming are the following;

1. Do these pupils achieve more in a regular classroom as compared to where the numbers are smaller such as being taught by an appropriate teacher of the handicapped?

2. Are regular teachers trained and educated properly to teach the handicapped in the classroom?

3. Would handicapped pupils attain more in a special class in which the pupil- teacher ratio is very low and where the teacher is properly trained and educated?

4. Do regular teachers receive aid service to assist with teaching the handicapped in the classroom?

5. How do normal children achieve in a mainstreamed classroom in which a handicapped pupil demands or needs much assistance?

In their research study on "Teacher Perceptions of Mainstreaming/ Inclusion, 1958- 1995: A Research Synthesis," Scruggs and Mastropieri concluded the following:

The primary implications for practice form this research synthesis derive from this consistent finding that teachers need support in teaching classes that include students with disabilities. These needs relate time, training, personnel, materials, class size, and consideration of severity of disability as follows:

* Time-- Teachers report a need for 1 hour or more per day to plan for students with learning disabilities.

* Training-- Teachers need systematic intensive training, either as part of their certification programs, as intensive and self- planned inservices, or as an ongoing process with consultants.

* Personnel resources-- Teachers report a need for additional personnel assistance to carry out mainstreaming objectives. This could include a half-time aide and daily contact with special education teachers.

* Materials resources-- Teachers need adequate curriculum materials and other classroom equipment appropriate to the needs of students with disabilities.

* Class size-- Teachers agree that their class size should be reduced to no fewer than twenty students, if students with disabilities are included.

* Consideration of severity of disability-- Teachers are more willing to include students with mild disabilities than students with more severe disabilities, apparently because of teachers' perceived ability to carry on their teaching mission for the entire classroom. By implication, the more severe the disabilities in the inclusive setting, the more the previously mentioned sources of support would be needed.

In Closing

Teachers and principals have a salient responsibility in determining the best approach in grouping pupils for instruction whereby each learner achieves optimally. There are numerous recommended procedures in grouping pupils for instruction which are recommended. Each has its pros and cons. Educators and parents need to study and analyze each method of grouping pupils for instruction. A well informed constituency in terms of how learners may be placed into groups for teaching and learning is necessary. A plan must be implemented which provides for each pupil to learn as much as possible. The plan or plans

of grouping chosen need to be based on a sound philosophy of education as well as a recommended foundation of the psychology of instruction. Rigid approaches must be avoided since flexibility is a key term when thinking of how learners should be grouped for instruction. Thus teaches and principals need to have an open mind in terms of how learners should be grouped so that each pupil can attain as much as possible in the school curriculum.

I make the following recommendations when emphasizing how learners should be grouped in the school curriculum:

1. the plan of grouping stressed must benefit the individual child in ongoing lessons and units of instruction.

2. an integrated curriculum whereby each subject mater area is related within the total curriculum should be implemented in grouping for instruction. The child should perceive knowledge and skills as being related.

3. parents need to be involved and informed about proposals for grouping learners for teaching and learning.

4. inservice education for teachers may well be necessary when implementing a new plan in grouping pupils for instruction.

5. the school curriculum and the approach to grouping learners for instruction need to be congruent and not separate in philosophical and psychological beliefs.

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